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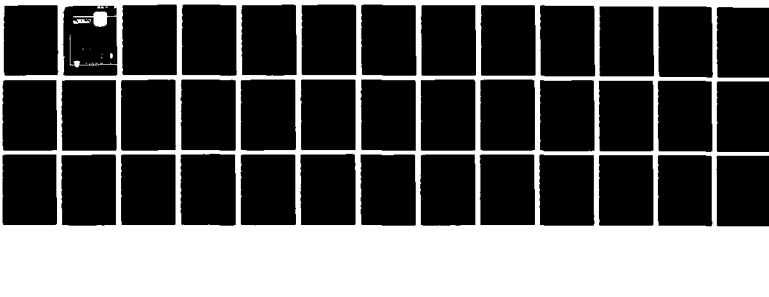
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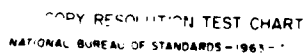
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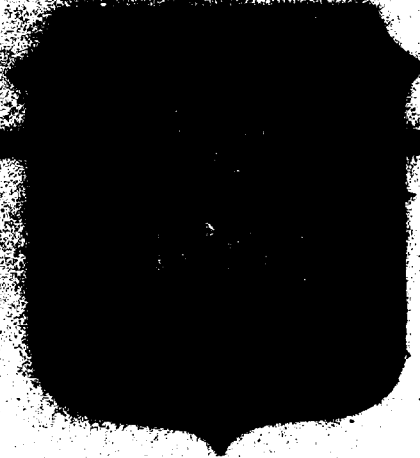
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the current security environment on the Korean peninsula, with emphasis on the increased threat from North Korea and the importance of U.S.-ROK security relations; second, to describe the future internal and external security environment of the peninsula; and third, to suggest desirable roles for the United States regarding Korean security issues.

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

A ROK PERSPECTIVE ON KOREAN SECURITY  
AND  
DESIRABLE ROLES FOR THE UNITED STATES

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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U.S. Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013  
23 March 1988

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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Yong-Soo Shin, COL, ROK Army

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Roles for the United States

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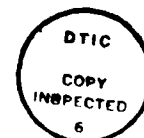
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. THE CURRENT SECURITY ENVIRONMENT OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA.....	4
Change of Regional Power Balance.....	4
The Impact of Improved Soviet-North Korean Military Ties.....	6
Military Imbalance and Tensions between North and South Korea.....	9
U.S.-ROK Security Relations.....	12
III. FUTURE PROSPECTS.....	15
IV. DESIRABLE ROLES FOR THE U.S. IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE IN KOREA.....	23
Continuation of a U.S. Deterrence Role.....	24
U.S. Cooperation with the ROK's Efforts toward Self-Reliance.....	25
Promoting Conditions for North-South Dialogue..	27
V. CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	31
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	33



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A ROK PERSPECTIVE ON KOREAN SECURITY AND  
DESIRABLE ROLES FOR THE UNITED STATES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Korea is a peninsula of Northeast Asia located at a critical point where the interests of the continental and oceanic powers come into collision. Historically, owing to its geopolitical location, Korea has been invaded a great number of times by foreign countries. With the end of World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to divide responsibility for disarming the Japanese forces still in Korea. The line of demarcation was the 38th parallel which bisects the Korean peninsula, with the USSR in the north and the U.S. in the south. This division has lasted for more than forty years.

On June 25, 1950, the North Koreans attacked the South, signalling the start of the Korean War. Although an Armistice was signed between the U.S. and North Korea in 1953, calling for a cease-fire, relations between North and South Korea continue to

be very hostile. The two are still legally in a state of war and, in the opinion of most Republic of Korea (ROK) and Western observers, another fighting war has been prevented only as a result of a physical balance of power on both sides of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) which was established at the time of the signing of the Armistice. In particular, even now, 35 years after the Armistice was signed, North Korea still has not given up its intention of unifying the peninsula by force; only the U.S. security commitment to the ROK and the stationing of U.S. troops in South Korea have deterred North Korean aggression.

Over the years, North Korea has been responsible for a number of acts of adventurism and terrorism. Examples include the Rangoon bombing of 1983 and the recent destruction of a Korean airliner en route from the Middle East. Many observers fear that North Korea will attempt to disrupt the 1988 Summer Olympic Games, scheduled to be held in Seoul. Nonetheless, the ROK expects to host successfully the Olympic Games. In fact, South Koreans hope that as a result of the prestige gained by the ROK and the realization by the North of its diplomatic isolation, the Kim Il-Sung regime may be persuaded to participate in a peaceful North-South dialogue leading to decreased tensions.

This paper has three major purposes: First, to describe and examine the current security environment on the Korean peninsula, with emphasis on the increased threat from North Korea and the importance of U.S.-ROK security relations; second, to describe

the future external and internal security environment of the peninsula; and third, to suggest desirable roles for the United States regarding Korean security.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CURRENT SECURITY ENVIRONMENT OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA

#### Change of Regional Power Balance

Since the end of the Korean War, inter-Korean conflict has developed in the context of the regional power balance among the four major powers involved, the United States, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Japan.<sup>1</sup> Because of these complicated relationships, it is very difficult to maintain peace and stability on the peninsula without regional peace.

During the Cold War period after the Korean War, the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, maintained a regional power balance in Northeast Asia. By the detente period of the 1970's, China and Japan had emerged as independent regional powers and a new balance was created. The USSR increased its military forces and strength in the area while the U.S. was suffering a relative decline in military strength following the Vietnam War. Dramatic changes in Sino-U.S. and Sino-Japanese relations also affected this balance. A new quadripartite balance of power emerged, with each of the four powers deeply involved in Korean affairs.

Even though this balance maintained Northeast Asian

stability during the detente era, from the ROK perspective the most alarming factor was the increasing military power of the Soviets contrasted with the waning presence of the Americans. For North Korea, moreover, a great opportunity was provided by the Sino-Soviet split. The North Koreans have skillfully exploited this rift to play the two against each other. As China and the USSR have competed for Pyongyang's friendship, each has been pushed into providing more and better military equipment.

In the 1980's, however, the Reagan administration brought what might be called a New Cold War Era with a resumption of U.S. military superiority in the region, the remarkable improvement of Sino-American relations aimed in part at the Soviets, the strengthening of U.S.-China-Japan cooperation and Reagan's clear intention to maintain forward deployed U.S. forces in Korea. On the one hand, the ROK gained confidence from all of these steps regarding maintenance of security on the peninsula. On the other hand, the ROK recognized a new threat -- that these measures served to stimulate a Soviet military build-up in the area as well as an improvement in Soviet-North Korean ties.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the Sino-American relationship has radically changed since 1979, with economic, political and security cooperation, the two countries continue to hold different views on the military threat in Northeast Asia.

On the other hand, Japan's view is affected both by its concern to maintain a strong relationship with the U.S. and also

by its desire to gain an economic advantage in dealing with the Soviet Union, specifically the lure of a favored role for Japanese firms in the development of Siberia.<sup>2</sup> These differing views all impact on the maintainance of stability on the peninsula.

In this light, the Republic of Korea perceives that its own role has increased, particularly with respect to: (1) maintenance of stability on the peninsula; (2) the security of Japan; and (3) political leverage possible vis a vis the U.S. to ensure maintenance of a power balance in the region.

#### The Impact of Improved Soviet-North Korean Military Ties

Following the Soviet disarmament of Japanese forces in North Korea in 1945, the USSR set up the communist government in Pyongyang and maintained extremely close party and state relations. During the Korean War, although the Soviets did not directly participate in the fighting, they supported North Korea with aid and materiel against a new common enemy, the United States. Today they maintain a solid partnership with a shared communist ideology and close political, economic, diplomatic and military relations.

There have been times, however, when Soviet-North Korean relations have not been as close as appearances suggested.

Although a military alliance existed between the two, the intensity of their political and economic relations has varied. Following the Sino-Soviet split Pyongyang has been able to choose sides, moving towards either Moscow or Beijing when it appeared to be in North Korea's advantage. In this way Kim Il-Sung has been able to gain considerable economic and military support from both the USSR and China. Although PRC-North Korean relations were particularly close in the early 1970's, by the late 1970's China's opening to the West, particularly its improved relationships with the U.S. and Japan, alarmed Kim Il-Sung sufficiently to incline him back to a closer relationship with the USSR, especially after the Soviet destruction of Korean Airline's Flight 007 in September 1983.<sup>3</sup> A month later Moscow diplomatically supported Pyongyang following the Rangoon bombing incident even though foreign observers do not believe Moscow knew of the plan in advance.

In May 1984, Kim Il-Sung visited Moscow and demanded increased Soviet economic and military support because of the growing U.S.-PRC-Japan cooperation. Apparently as a result, the Soviets started to supply North Korea with more sophisticated military equipment including MIG-23 fighter aircraft and SCUD, SA-7 and SA-3 missiles. In return, Moscow gained overflight rights over North Korean territory. Soviet TU-16's and TU-95's now regularly fly along the DMZ and into the Yellow Sea, presumably on intelligence gathering missions aimed at U.S. and

ROK forces. It is possible that they are also aimed at PRC military activities in the region.<sup>4</sup>

The USSR has also gained access to certain North Korean ports. In August 1985, a Soviet warship called at the East Sea (Sea of Japan) port of Wonsan. Shortly thereafter a North Korea naval ship called at Vladivostok. The two countries also held a joint naval drill in mid-October 1986.<sup>5</sup>

Even though some American observers believe the military ties between Moscow and Pyongyang to be more symbolic than real, many Koreans perceive them to impact heavily on security of the peninsula with political and military implications.

Politically, the most significant point to note is the increased Soviet presence in North Korea, which implies that in any future conflict, the Soviets might play a more active role than they did during the Korean War of 1950. In such a case Moscow may be able to exert greater control over Pyongyang. Closer Soviet-North Korean ties mean that Beijing's influence on Pyongyang is relatively reduced and it is likely to be more and more difficult for China to control North Korean adventurism.

Militarily, Soviet assistance reinforces North Korean military power and deepens the military imbalance between North and South Korea. In addition, Soviet reconnaissance flights across North Korea make U.S., South Korean and Japanese anti-aircraft systems vulnerable and expose large areas to Soviet intelligence gathering.<sup>6</sup>



## Military Imbalance and Tensions between North and South Korea

For the past 35 years since the end of the Korean War, North Korea has maintained a distinct military superiority over the South, despite South Korean efforts to build up its military power. Virtually all South Koreans believe North Korean aggression has been prevented only by the strength of the U.S.-ROK combined forces. A study group of Korea experts sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society noted, "Even taking into account the qualitative advantages of the South Korean and U.S. forces, the North still has a quantitative lead in some critical areas, such as numbers of troops, armor and artillery."<sup>7</sup> According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London, North Korean regular forces number 838,000 (versus 629,000 for the ROK), with five mechanized divisions (two for the ROK), four armored divisions (one for the ROK), and a lead of approximately 3:1 in tanks (3275 for the North versus 1300 for the South). The North also maintains a quantitative lead in both ships and planes (930 combat aircraft and 432 combat vessels versus the ROK's 462 and 120).<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, North Korean forces are organized to facilitate a preemptive surprise attack with massive artillery and missile fire capability teamed with high speed mechanized equipment and extensive special purpose forces.

Dr. Young-Koo Cha, a noted Korean military analyst at the

Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, points out that in recent years,

North Korea has forward-deployed some 65 percent of its combat units near the DMZ; newly activated armored, mechanized and artillery corps; increased its offensive capabilities drastically with MIG-23's, medium-range guided missiles, and armed 500-MD helicopters.<sup>9</sup>

According to former ROK Minister of National Defense Ki-Baek Lee, the recent discovery of North Korean plans to build a huge dam near Mount Kumgang (just 10 kilometers north of the DMZ) is another new cause for military tension on the peninsula. The Kumgang dam is so large, with a water storage capacity of 20 billion tons, that if broken, whether accidentally or by design, it would completely flood the metropolitan area of Seoul. Former Minister Lee believes the dam is being built primarily for military purposes and could be used to flood Seoul in advance of an attack from the North.<sup>10</sup>

Over the years, U.S. and South Korean forces have discovered three large underground tunnels transecting the DMZ. In addition, it is believed that North Korea has built as many as 18 other tunnels, which would clearly be a threat to the security of the South.<sup>11</sup>

South Koreans find the examples of North Korean terrorism particularly alarming. In particular, the Korean airliner bombing incident of November 29, 1987, off the coast of Burma, indicates that North Korea is willing to use any means against

the ROK, even though this brings considerable international criticism. South Korea is especially leery of Pyongyang's intentions with regard to the Summer Olympic Games since it appears that the North may well resort to terrorism in an attempt to disrupt the Games and discredit the South.

Many South Koreans believe that the time when North Korea could successfully invade the South is about to run out, primarily because of political and economic advances in the ROK. South Korea's rapid economic growth will lead to the reversal of the superior military position of the North. Second, South Korea is counting on holding a successful Olympics with a resulting increase in international prestige.

The North, in contrast, if it continues its boycott of the Games, will find itself isolated from international society. Any terrorist act aimed at the Olympics has the likelihood of alienating the 161 countries participating. Third, South Korea's newly elected president and reformed democratic processes will increase the legitimacy and popularity of the government, reducing even farther the remote possibility of a proletarian revolution in the ROK.

An additional internal North Korean incentive against delay is Kim Il-Sung's often repeated goal of reunifying the peninsula during his lifetime. The Great Leader is aging, and his health is not certain. If he is to attempt to achieve his goal, he cannot wait much longer.

## U.S.-ROK Security Relations

Ever since the first U.S. military contingents landed in Korea in 1945, the United States has been the principal sponsor of the ROK. Moreover, since the Korean War, the United States has played a critical role in the survival and development of the ROK. The ROK's security has depended largely upon the U.S. security commitment of the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty signed in 1953. Since the end of the Korean War, the U.S. has contributed to the building-up of the ROK's defense capability through large-scale transfers of military equipment and technology.

In 1978, the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command (CFC) was created. Although the CFC continues to be commanded by a U.S. general, ROK forces now play a visible and substantive role in planning the defense of the ROK.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Cha has called U.S.-ROK security relations "a model case of military cooperation between a superpower and a lesser power."<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, from the ROK perspective, changes in U.S. foreign policy as well as in the international environment have put occasional strains on these relations. Although the main objectives of U.S. security policy regarding the ROK have not changed, the strategy and some of the assumptions underlying this policy have changed with different administrations. A Korean scholar has noted,

The U.S. policy to South Korea has been conditioned by its relations with the four major regional powers and also has been reactive to them as well...The United States views the area in a global and regional context, whereas the ROK's concern is limited to the North-South confrontation.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, President Carter's suggestion for a reduction of U.S. forces stationed in the ROK greatly alarmed the South Koreans. With the advent of the Reagan administration, U.S.-ROK military cooperation has been strengthened. Koreans believe that the Reagan-Chun summit meeting of November 1983, testified to this close relationship. More than 40,000 U.S. troops remain in Korea, symbolizing to South Koreans U.S. determination to assist in the defense of the ROK. Nonetheless, Koreans remain concerned about the post-Reagan period: Will this partnership continue? Will the U.S., perhaps for domestic political considerations, reduce or withdraw U.S. ground forces? Will trade frictions have a negative impact on U.S. security policies toward Korea? And will the U.S. request greater defense burden sharing by the ROK?

#### ENDNOTES

1. The discussion of the regional power balance is based on Young-Koo Cha, "Strategic Environment of Northeast Asia: A Korean Perspective," Korea & World Affairs, Summer 1986, pp. 281-295 and Sang-Woo Rhee, "Future of North-South Korean Relations and Desirable Roles of the United States," Journal of Asiatic Studies, January 1982, pp. 22-23.

2. Young-Koo Cha, A ROK Perspective on Northeast Asian Security in the 1990's, p. 10.

3. Suck-Ho Lee, "Evolution and Prospects of Soviet-North Korean Relations in the 1980's," Journal of Northeast Asian Studies, Fall 1986, pp. 19-20.
4. Cha, pp. 13-14.
5. "The North Korean Threat and Korean Security," Korea Herald, 21 October 1986, p. 2.
6. Cha, p. 14.
7. Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society, Korea at the Crossroads, p. 37.
8. International Institute of Strategic Studies, The Military Balance: 1987-1988, pp. 162-165.
9. Cha, p. 19.
10. "Huge Kungang Dam Being Built by North Korea," Korea Times, 11 November 1986, p. 1.
11. "Eighteen Underground Tunnels," Chosun Ilbo, 13 November 1986, p. 6.
12. Thomas L. Wilborn, U.S. Forces in Korea: An American Strategic Perspective, p. 17.
13. Cha, "Strategic Environment of Northeast Asia," p. 295.
14. Kwang-Il Baek, "The U.S.-ROK Security Relationship Within the Conceptual Framework of a Great and Small Power Alliance," Journal of East and West Studies, January 1983, p. 147.

### CHAPTER III

#### FUTURE PROSPECTS

Because of changes in the internal and external environment on the Korean peninsula in 1988, there are new challenges as well as great opportunities for peace and security in Korea.

In terms of the external environment, one of the most important changes is a change in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. The two countries signed an historic treaty concerning Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) on December 8, 1987. With this treaty as a stimulus, the U.S. and the USSR seem to be pursuing a new detente policy. Indeed, the two sides are now attempting to negotiate a treaty governing strategic range missiles. Even though it is hoped that the INF treaty will be effective in reducing the nuclear threat in Asia as well as in Europe, some observers perceive that detente (as evidenced by the treaty) will not change the fundamental global strategic interests of the two superpowers.<sup>1</sup>

It seems likely that in a local conflict, it may not be possible peacefully to resolve different points of view, and Moscow and/or Washington may feel the necessity to intervene. Koreans are particularly concerned that a changing U.S.

perception of the Soviet threat may lead to an American reassessment of the strategic importance of the Korean peninsula.<sup>2</sup> Most Koreans are convinced that a lessening of the U.S. presence and profile in Korea may signal North Korea that U.S. interest and resolve in maintaining peace and stability in the region are weakened.

On the other hand, the improvement of U.S.-USSR relations can play an affirmative role in enlarging USSR-ROK relations, which are at present both indirect and limited. Moscow now may have some latitude to improve relations with Seoul because Kim Il-Sung is unlikely to break with Moscow on this issue given Pyongyang's recent success in getting advanced weaponry from Moscow, as well as his disapproval of PRC economic and political reforms.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, attendance by the Soviet Union at the Seoul Olympic Games may give the initial push for improved ROK-Soviet relations. Indeed, many Koreans hope this relationship might foster expanded dialogue between North and South Korea. It is even possible that Moscow might reassess its opposition not only to Korean entry to the United Nations (both North and South) but also to the cross recognition solution favored by the ROK.<sup>4</sup>

The United States and the ROK are likely to try to maintain a strong and friendly relationship, although trade and economic issues threaten to cause some strains. Washington is certain to continue to exert pressure on the ROK to open its markets to U.S.



goods and services. The new Korean administration will probably seek to reduce trade imbalances and if possible expand imports from the U.S. while reducing those from Japan. But any significant change, such as lowering import tariffs or removing monopoly protection, will stimulate opposition among those groups in Korea whose interests are threatened. Thus the Korean government may once again have to deal with angry demonstrations of laborers, students and others with resulting danger to the relatively fragile democratic balance.

On the other hand, U.S.-ROK security relations will probably continue without major changes, although several issues will have to be resolved.<sup>5</sup> For one thing, the U.S. hopes that the ROK will be willing to undertake a greater share of the defense burden. The ROK, for its part, would like to see a Korean general made the Ground Component Commander of the CFC.<sup>6</sup> In addition, several opposition politicians have called for changes in the composition of the CFC, but it appears that most Koreans are reluctant to make changes which may send the wrong signal to North Korea.

Most analysts agree that the PRC can be expected to continue to pursue a pragmatic and open policy in the coming years. Even though China is concerned about Pyongyang's growing ties with Moscow, Beijing will probably quietly seek to improve relations with Seoul. South Koreans are hopeful that ties between the PRC and the ROK can be expanded and have even

suggested cooperation in the economic development of the Yellow Sea. The main objective of better relations with the PRC is the hope that Beijing would play a moderating role in inter-Korean relations and would help promote North-South dialogue.<sup>7</sup> The ROK recognizes, however, that China's influence, by itself, would probably be insufficient to deter North Korea aggression if Kim Il-Sung were to choose to act unilaterally as he did in 1950, but the Chinese example and persuasion may convince Pyongyang to begin to open its society to the outside world.

It is expected that the new Japanese cabinet will maintain Japan's strong relationship with the United States and the ROK, but at the same time many observers believe Tokyo will attempt to improve relations with Moscow in order to participate in the economic development of Siberia and in hopes of moving towards a resolution of the Northern Territory question. It is unlikely that Japan-ROK military ties will improve because of historical animosities between the two nations. Seoul anticipates that after the Olympic Games, the Japanese may move to expand economic relations with North Korea despite South Korea's unhappiness at the prospect. Many people expect that the Japanese Socialist Party, in particular, will put pressure on its government to increase contacts with Pyongyang.<sup>8</sup>

As regards inter-Korean relations, Seoul is almost certain to push for a resumption of a North-South dialogue, particularly in the wake of what is expected to be the successful hosting of

the Olympic Games in Seoul. Seoul believes the Pyongyang regime will refuse any such proposal for the foreseeable future. Instead, Pyongyang will probably repeat earlier proposals of its own for troop reductions on both sides of the DMZ, including the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the peninsula. Thus, it appears unlikely that there will be any dramatic improvement in North-South relations without significant involvement of some or all of the four major powers tied to events in the Korean peninsula.

Those with a negative view of inter-Korean relations feel that tensions between the two may be increased, particularly since Pyongyang is facing major problems domestically as well as externally. As Dr. Cha points out, North Korea suffers under

a sluggish economy; severe political control; pent-up dissatisfaction with a closed society; isolation in international society; and growing dissatisfaction among the military and technocrats with Kim Jong-Il's succession of power. These circumstances have worked together to accelerate the threat perception among its leadership.<sup>9</sup>

Some observers have suggested that there is a danger that North Korea, fearing that it will soon lose its military superiority over the South, and as a result, have to abandon their goal of unifying the peninsula by force, may feel obliged to take some action in the near future, rather than see its last chance slip away.<sup>10</sup>

Here we can make the following assumptions: (1) Within

the next few years, it is possible that North Korea may again risk an all-out war, particularly if Kim Jong-Il succeeds his father and needs a cause to divert attention from internal North Korean problems; and (2) before or during the Olympic Games, the North is very likely to undertake special operations and/or terrorist actions against the South to disrupt the Games and discredit the ROK.

Nonetheless, South Korea hopes that both of the above courses of action can be deterred and further even entertains dreams that the prestige accruing to the ROK from a successful Olympics coupled with the diplomatic isolation of the North will force Pyongyang to accept the logic of peaceful coexistence.

Looking at the ROK internal situation, many observers feel that South Korea is at a critical turning point, facing important decisions regarding the direction of its politics, economics, diplomacy and military.<sup>11</sup>

Politically, the new administration which took office in February 1988, has said that it will promote increased democratization with the resolution of a number of outstanding political issues, political-social stability, the guarantee of freedom of the press and human rights, the reduction of regional rivalries within South Korea, the execution of a plan for increased local autonomy and other reforms. Although opposed by some conservatives, most South Koreans believe greater democratization can be accomplished without sacrificing security.

The new administration, may, however, feel obliged to continue to take a hard line against demands of some leftist student groups.

Economically, South Korea's biggest challenge is probably that of dealing with U.S. pressure to open markets and reduce the bilateral trade imbalance. Other domestic economic problems include that of redistributing the profits of economic prosperity and labor demands for higher wages. The government will have to try to resolve the differences with the U.S. without causing significant internal disruption. One suggestion is to aggressively seek alternative export markets, particularly those in Eastern Europe. Given the ROK's stature as one of the four "tigers" of East Asia, it is clear that economic issues, domestic and foreign, will become even more important to South Korea in the coming years.

Diplomatically, through successfully hosting the Olympic Games, the ROK expects not only to enhance its international prestige, but also to improve relations with countries with which it does not have official diplomatic relations, particularly the PRC, the USSR and Eastern Europe, all of whom have said they will participate in the Games despite North Korea's call for a boycott.<sup>12</sup>

Militarily, the ROK would like to maintain a strong defense system in combination with the United States. At the same time. South Korea would like to establish a self-reliant defense capability in hopes of overcoming the present North-South

military imbalance.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Cha, A ROK Perspective, p.8, represents this point of view.
2. "Prospects for Korean Economic Diplomacy," Chosun Ilbo, 28 January 1988, p. 10.
3. Ibid.
4. In 1976, then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger proposed cross-recognition of North and South Korea by the four major powers involved in the region. The United States and Japan would recognize North Korea at the same time that the Soviet Union and China recognized South Korea. Pyongyang rejected this proposal. See, for example, Hak-Joon Kim, "The Road toward Korean Unification," Chosun Ilbo, 30 January 1988, p. 8.
5. For discussions of the future of U.S.-ROK security relations, see Young-Koo Cha, U.S.-ROK Security Relations: Korean Perspective, August 1985; Thomas L. Wilborn, U.S. Forces in Korea: An American Strategic Perspective; and Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society, Korea at the Crossroads.
6. The current command and control system of the allied forces in Korea is very complicated with the Commander-in-chief of the Combined Forces Command (a U.S. four-star general) wearing at least four other hats as well. See Taek-Hyung Rhee, US-ROK Combined Operations: A Korean Perspective, p. 2.
7. Chang Wook Chung, "China's Role in Two-Korea Relations in the 1980's," Journal of Northeast Asian Studies, Fall 1986, p. 63.
8. Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society, p. 44.
9. Cha, A ROK Perspective, p. 19.
10. Ibid., p. 5.
11. "Prospects for Korean Economic Diplomacy," p. 10.
12. Clyde Haberman, "Seoul Olympic Rings Include Some Made of Barbed Wire," New York Times, 18 March 1988, p. 33.

## CHAPTER IV

### DESIRABLE ROLES FOR THE U.S. IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE IN KOREA

The ultimate aspiration of virtually all South Koreans is to unify the peninsula by peaceful means. Given the current internal and external environment of the peninsula, however, their immediate hope is for peaceful coexistence between the two Koreas. Since they perceive that they are at a critical juncture regarding Korean security, most South Koreans hope there will be an opportunity to prevent the repetition of another Korean War. They would like to see peaceful competition, or better yet, cooperation between the North and the South in the hope that this would help create conditions under which peaceful unification might be possible.

Nonetheless, Koreans recognize that there is always a possibility that North Korea may persist in a policy of adventurism towards the South, particularly if it miscalculates the U.S. or ROK reaction. In this light, South Koreans regard U.S.-ROK security relations as vital and the U.S. role one that no other country can fulfill. From the South Korean point of view, it is essential that U.S. resolve and interest in preserving peace and stability on the Korean peninsula be maintained.

### Continuation of a U.S. Deterrence Role

North Korea has not given up its intention of using military force to achieve Communist unification of the peninsula. At the moment, Pyongyang appears to enjoy military superiority over the South. Nonetheless, the Pyongyang regime has not attacked the South, almost certainly because of U.S. involvement. Virtually all South Koreans are convinced that the strong U.S. commitment to the ROK's defense and the presence of U.S. troops on the peninsula have played and continue to play a decisive role in the security of the region. As a Korean scholar points out,

It is widely believed that the presence of the Second Infantry Division in the ROK is a strong psychological deterrent to North Korean aggression. Because of the location of this unit [north of Seoul in a strategic reserve position] the North Korean army could not reach Seoul without first fighting the division.<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1970's, South Koreans were alarmed at the suggestion from President Carter that some U.S. troops might be removed from Korea. Today, they continue to be concerned about possible future changes in the U.S. role in Korea. Thus even though many Americans now feel that a Korean should be appointed as the CFC Ground Component Commander, and many Koreans agree, the latter are nonetheless reluctant to have any change in the command relationship, at least in the short-term, for fear that



this might mean other changes as well and may send the wrong signal to Pyongyang.<sup>2</sup>

Most South Koreans hope that the U.S. military presence and resolve will remain essentially unchanged until possibly such time as the ROK will have sufficient capability on its own to deter (or deal with) North Korean aggression.<sup>3</sup>

#### U.S. Cooperation with the ROK's Efforts toward Self-Reliance

South Koreans believe that after the ROK has sufficient deterrent power of its own, military tension on the peninsula will decrease. Thus one of the primary goals of the ROK is to achieve maximum self-sufficiency and a self-reliant deterrent capability. The ROK's spectacular economic growth and development leads most observers to conclude that it is only a matter of time until the ROK reaches this goal. South Korea's military sector has of course benefitted from this economic growth as well as from U.S. military aid under such programs as the Military Assistance Service Fund (MASF), the Military Assistance Program (MAP) and Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credits.

In the 1980's, however, faced with massive budget deficits and an alarming trade deficit with the ROK, the United States has begun to expect that South Korea should bear a greater share of

the defense burden. Military grants have been reduced or eliminated. For example, FMS credit was suspended in 1987.<sup>4</sup>

The trade imbalance continues to cause problems in the U.S.-ROK bilateral relationship with possible spillover to the military relationship. The ROK "miracle" has been based on export to the U.S. market while protecting Korean industries and services by tariff and non-tariff barriers. Trade frictions have become highly visible and contentious. One U.S. presidential hopeful, Richard Gephardt, has made the Korean trade problem part of his campaign platform.

Koreans believe that this issue should be resolved gradually through understanding and trust between the two countries if they are to maintain their friendship in the future. From the ROK point of view, a number of concessions have already been made to American demands such as a partial appreciation of the won, although not enough to satisfy the U.S. The new Korean administration will have to address these issues but will probably proceed slowly because of the opposition of many groups whose livelihood would be threatened by an open market.

Koreans hope that the United States will keep Korean conditions in mind and will not demand too much too fast. Koreans look on the U.S. as a big brother and expect that a big brother should be generous and understanding towards a younger brother. South Korea faces domestic economic problems such as a fairer distribution of profits and labor-management conflicts

with serious implications for internal stability and ultimately for external security. The ROK wants time to address these problems before causing the dislocations and readjustments that would result from radical changes to its economic system.

The ROK has the dual goal of economic development and military improvement in order to establish its self-reliant deterrence against North Korea. According to Korean thinking, the United States and the ROK should resolve economic issues with mutual cooperation, mutual respect and mutual trust based on the common objective of maintaining peace and security on the peninsula.

#### Promoting Conditions for North-South Dialogue

Many scholars believe that the best way to reduce tensions and achieve settlement of a durable peace on the Korean peninsula is to gradually tackle these issues in a dialogue between North and South Korea. Unfortunately, the North-South dialogue has broken off because the objectives and approaches of the two sides are fundamentally different.

South Koreans believe the North's true objective is to weaken the ROK by bringing about the withdrawal of U.S. troops,<sup>5</sup> in part by causing increased internal political turmoil and anti-Americanism. South Korea's objectives, on the

other hand, are to "build confidence between the South and North and to create an international framework to safeguard its security before the question of the withdrawal of U.S. forces is addressed."<sup>6</sup> Therefore the ROK "emphasizes a step-by-step process, focusing initially on economic and humanitarian issues...and on the proposals for United Nations memberships and cross-recognition of the two Koreas."<sup>7</sup>

Although the dialogue basically concerns bilateral problems between Seoul and Pyongyang, it is not immune to the interests and influences of the major collateral powers, the United States, the Soviet Union and China.

It is not clear precisely how the Soviets and Chinese view the North-South dialogue. It appears that they do not want another war on the peninsula and it seems logical to assume that they would not oppose North-South dialogue. Nonetheless, they have not played constructive roles in the process, despite pressure and persuasion from the U.S. Some analysts feel that neither the PRC nor the USSR has been able to take an independent position on the issues because of political blackmail from the North Koreans.<sup>8</sup> Any attempt to pressure the North Koreans simply pushes them closer to the rival's camp. Thus both the USSR and the PRC have supported unrealistic North Korean demands while rejecting proposals such as those calling for cross-recognition and dual U.N. membership.

Given these conditions, any North-South dialogue needs new

motivation and a more realistic approach if it is to succeed. Many South Koreans hope that the Seoul Olympic Games will be the stimulus to revive the dialogue and look to the U.S. to continue to play a positive role in promoting dialogue in the following ways.

1. Washington should use diplomatic efforts to urge Moscow and Beijing to support resumption of the dialogue.

2. Similarly Washington should persuade Moscow and Beijing to use their influence with Pyongyang to revive the dialogue.

3. Washington should support Seoul's renewed efforts to revitalize the North-South dialogue.

4. And after discussion with Seoul, Washington should gradually increase contacts with Pyongyang in an effort to get that closed society to become part of the international community of nations. The hope is that a more open North Korea will be motivated to abstain from "outlaw" actions such as terrorism and to approach negotiations with Seoul with a more positive attitude.<sup>9</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1. Baek, p. 144.

2. Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society, pp. 48-49.

3. Cha, "Strategic Environment of Northeast Asia," p. 298.

4. Cha, U.S.-ROK Security Relations, pp. 18-20.

5. Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society,  
p. 39.

6. Ibid., p. 40.

7. Ibid.

8. Hak-Joon Kim, "Prospects for Korean Unification in the  
Changing East Asian International Politics," p. 394.

9. This last point is not shared by all Koreans. Some  
people oppose any contact between the U.S. and North Korea  
because they fear North Korea will use the opportunity to cause a  
split between the U.S. and the ROK.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

It goes without saying that the most urgent problem of the ROK today is to prevent another war on the peninsula by deterring a North Korean attack on the South. Resolution of this problem depends largely on the following factors: (1) enhancing the ROK's democratization leading to greater political and social stability; (2) maintaining a strong ROK defense posture, including preservation of the U.S. security commitment and the stationing of U.S. troops in Korea; (3) building the ROK's self-reliant defense capability while continuing economic growth; and (4) promoting conditions for a resumption of the North-South dialogue.

We can probably assume that the ROK will continue on the path to greater democratization and economic well-being, but many Koreans are very concerned about the other factors affecting ROK security which can easily be influenced by outside events and changes. Thus they feel particularly dependent on the U.S., its attitudes and its role.

Two major events occur in the ROK in 1988. One, the inauguration of a freely elected president following a peaceful transfer of power, took place on 25 February. The second is the

hosting of the Seoul Olympic Summer Games in September. The Olympics is expected to be the largest ever with athletes from 161 of the 167 member nations of the International Olympic Committee, including the Soviet Union, China, East Germany and most of the rest of the Warsaw Pact countries as well as many other countries which do not have diplomatic relations with the ROK.

Many observers, Korean and others, fear that North Korea may attempt some provocative act to disrupt the Olympics and discredit the ROK. Koreans are counting heavily on a successful Olympics which they hope will help pave the way for a durable peace on the peninsula. They further hope that the United States will initiate international efforts with other major powers to prevent North Korea from attempting another adventure which could destabilize the peninsula.



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